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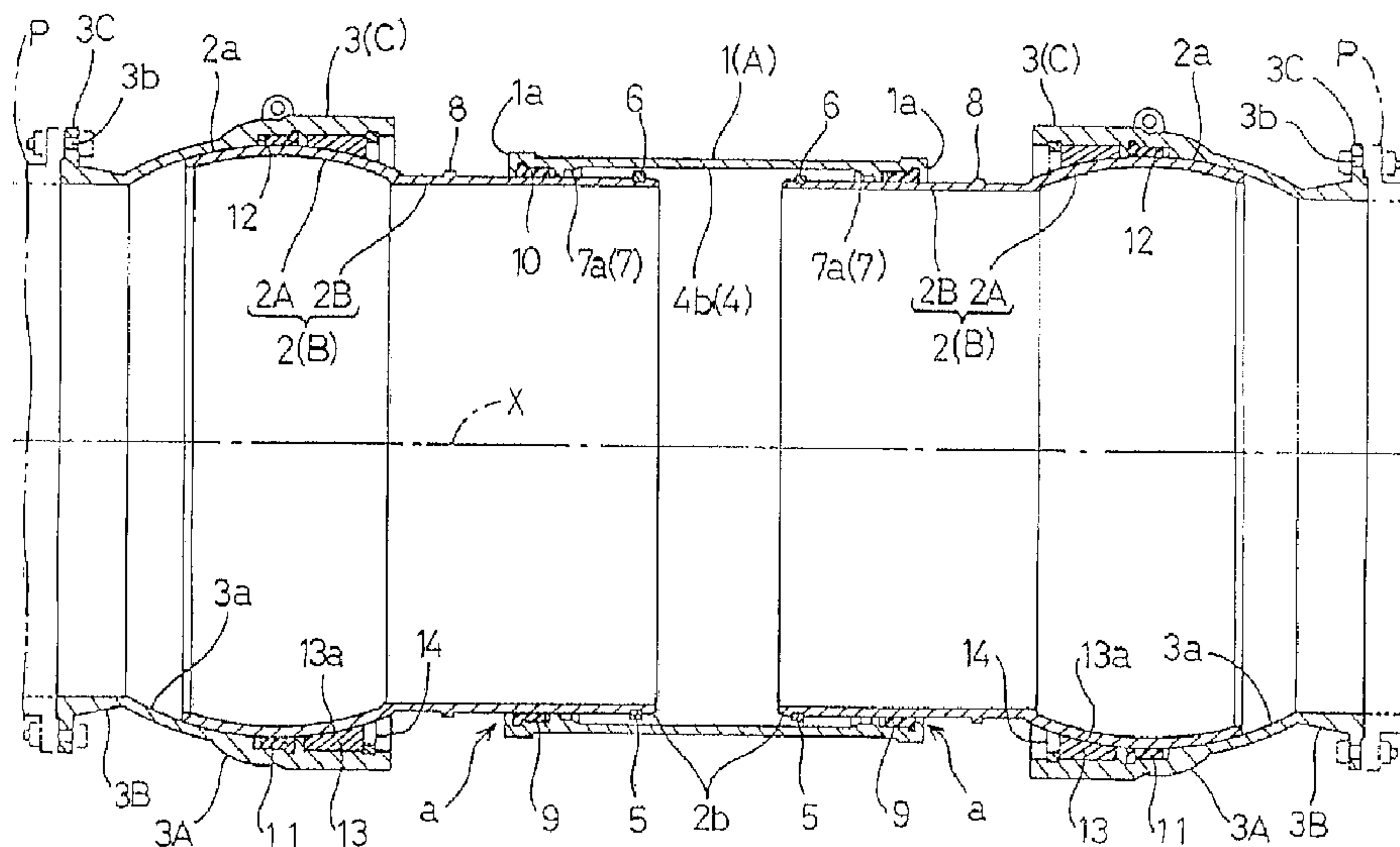
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(54) Title: FLEXIBLE PIPE CONNECTOR



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

A flexible pipe connector including a first cylindrical member, a second cylindrical member to be inserted into the first cylindrical member, an annular restricting groove defined in an inner peripheral face of the first cylindrical member, an annular attaching groove defined in an outer peripheral face of the second cylindrical member and having a shorter length than the restricting groove in a direction of cylinder axis, a retaining member radially expandably and detachably fitted to the attaching groove for coming into contact with an end face of the restricting groove in the cylinder axis direction so as to restrict range of relative movement between the first and second cylindrical members in the cylinder axis direction. The outer peripheral face of the second cylindrical member and the inner peripheral face of the first cylindrical member are provided with a radial opposing distance therebetween determined so as to allow insertion and withdrawal of the retaining member. The connector also includes a radial-expansion restricting portion for preventing, through contact, a radially outward withdrawing movement of the retaining member from the attaching groove when the retaining member comes into contact, along the direction of the cylinder axis, against an end face of the restricting groove located on the side of an entrance opening of the first cylindrical member. At least mutually contacting portions respectively of the end face of the restricting groove and an end face of the retaining member are formed as faces extending substantially normal to the cylinder axis or tapered faces extending radially outward as approaching the entrance opening of the first cylindrical member.

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A flexible pipe connector including a first cylindrical member, a second cylindrical member to be inserted into the first cylindrical member, an annular restricting groove defined in an inner peripheral face of the first cylindrical member, an annular attaching groove defined in an outer peripheral face of the second cylindrical member and having a shorter length than the restricting groove in a direction of cylinder axis, a retaining member radially expandably and detachably fitted to the attaching groove for coming into contact with an end face of the restricting groove in the cylinder axis direction so as to restrict range of relative movement between the first and second cylindrical members in the cylinder axis direction. The outer peripheral face of the second cylindrical member and the inner peripheral face of the first cylindrical member are provided with a radial opposing distance therebetween determined so as to allow insertion and withdrawal of the retaining member. The connector also includes a radial-expansion restricting portion for preventing, through contact, a radially outward withdrawing movement of the retaining member from the attaching groove when

the retaining member comes into contact, along the direction of the cylinder axis, against an end face of the restricting groove located on the side of an entrance opening of the first cylindrical member. At least mutually contacting portions respectively of the end face of the restricting groove and an end face of the retaining member are formed as faces extending substantially normal to the cylinder axis or tapered faces extending radially outward as approaching the entrance opening of the first cylindrical member.

## FLEXIBLE PIPE CONNECTOR

## BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

## 5 1. FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a flexible pipe connector, and more particularly to a pipe connector including a first cylindrical member and a second cylindrical member inserted into the first cylindrical member, the first cylindrical member defining, in an inner peripheral face thereof, an annular restricting groove, the second cylindrical member defining, in an outer peripheral face thereof, an annular attaching groove having a shorter axial length than the annular restricting groove of the first cylindrical member, the attaching groove being detachably attached with a radially deformable retaining member for coming into contact with an axial end face of the restricting groove for restricting range of relative axial movement between the two cylindrical members, the outer peripheral face of the second cylindrical member and the inner peripheral face of the first cylindrical member being provided with a radial opposing distance therebetween determined so as to allow insertion and

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withdrawal of the retaining member.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

5           In assembling an flexible pipe connector of the  
above-noted type, first, the second cylindrical member  
is inserted into the first cylindrical member, when a  
leading end of the second cylindrical member is placed  
at an axially intermediate portion of the restricting  
10       groove defined in the inner peripheral face of the  
first cylindrical member. Then, through the annular  
gap formed between the outer peripheral face of the  
second cylindrical member and the inner peripheral  
face of the first cylindrical member, the retaining  
15       member which is being radially expanded is inserted  
from the leading end of the second cylindrical member  
to the attaching groove of the same. In this  
condition, the radially expanded condition of the  
retaining member is released to allow this retaining  
20       member to be reduced radially to elastically fit the  
attaching groove.

          As described above, with this type of flexible  
pipe connector, the annular gap for  
insertion/withdrawal of the retaining member is formed  
25       between the outer peripheral face of the second

cylindrical member and the inner peripheral face of the first cylindrical member. Therefore, an external force in the withdrawing direction generated in association with an earthquake or differential settlement affects both of the two cylindrical members which are un-withdrawably and expandably connected to each other within the movable range determined by the length of the restricting groove. In this, the retaining member fitted to the attaching groove of the second cylindrical member is strongly pressed in the axial direction against one end face of the restricting groove located on the side of the entrance opening of the first cylindrical member, when the retaining member is urged to elastically deform or expand radially, so that this retaining member may be inadvertently detached or withdrawn from the attaching groove of the second cylindrical member.

For this reason, a conventional flexible pipe connector has a construction shown in Fig. 12. In this construction, a contact face 50a of the restricting groove 50 and a contact face 51a of the retaining member 51 are formed respectively as a tapered face having a decreasing diameter toward the entrance opening (a) of the first cylindrical member A, so that these tapered contact faces 50a, 51a come

into contact against each other in the axial direction when such withdrawing-direction external force is applied to the two cylindrical members A, B. And, the tapered contact face 50a of the restricting groove 50 has a minimum diameter which is same as or smaller than a minimum outside diameter of the tapered contact face 51a of the retaining member 51 (see Japanese un-examined utility model gazette No. 4-136392 for example).

In the case of the conventional flexible pipe connector having the above-described construction, when the withdrawing-direction external force is applied to the two cylindrical members A, B to cause the tapered face 51a of the retaining member 51 fitted to the attaching groove 52 of the second cylindrical member B and the tapered face 50a of the first cylindrical member A to come into contact against each other, the retaining member 51 is strongly pressed against the inner peripheral face of the attaching groove 52 of the second cylindrical member B. Thus, there occurs mutual sliding movement between the tapered face 51a of the retaining member 51 and the tapered face 50a of the first cylindrical member A. In association with this mutual sliding movement, the portion of the first cylindrical member A on the side

of the entrance opening (a) thereof elastically deforms in the radially outward direction and the portion of the second cylindrical member B on the side of its inserted end side elastically deforms in the radially inward direction. And, if the sum of the amounts of these elastic radial deformations of the two cylindrical members exceeds a radial engagement width L between the tapered face 51a of the retaining member 51 and the tapered face 50a of the first cylindrical member A, the retained condition between the two cylindrical members A, B is forcibly released.

Therefore, in order to improve the retention condition between the cylindrical members A, B, it is necessary to increase the radial engagement width L between the tapered face 51a of the retaining member 51 and the tapered face 50a of the first cylindrical member A. But, such enlargement of this width tends to result in radial enlargement of the entire pipe connector.

The present invention attends to the above-described state of the art, and its primary object is to provide a flexible pipe connector which may be formed compact in the radial direction and which yet is capable of preventing inadvertent withdrawal of the two cylindrical members more effectively.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

For accomplishing the above-noted object, a  
5 flexible pipe connector, according to the present  
invention, comprises:

a first cylindrical member;

a second cylindrical member to be inserted into  
the first cylindrical member;

10 an annular restricting groove defined in an inner  
peripheral face of the first cylindrical member;

an annular attaching groove defined in an outer  
peripheral face of the second cylindrical member and  
having a shorter length than the restricting groove in  
15 a direction of cylinder axis;

a retaining member radially expandably and  
detachably fitted to the attaching groove for coming  
into contact with an end face of the restricting  
groove in the cylinder axis direction so as to  
20 restrict range of relative movement between the first  
and second cylindrical members in the cylinder axis  
direction;

the outer peripheral face of the second  
cylindrical member and the inner peripheral face of  
25 the first cylindrical member being provided with a

radial opposing distance therebetween determined so as to allow insertion and withdrawal of the retaining member;

5 a radial-expansion restricting portion for preventing, through contact, a radially outward withdrawing movement of the retaining member from the attaching groove when the retaining member comes into contact, along the direction of the cylinder axis,  
10 against an end face of the restricting groove located on the side of an entrance opening of the first cylindrical member;

wherein, at least mutually contacting portions respectively of the end face of the restricting groove  
15 and an end face of the retaining member are formed as faces extending substantially normal to the cylinder axis or tapered faces extending radially outward as approaching the entrance opening of the first cylindrical member.

20 According to one aspect of the present invention, there is provided a flexible pipe connector comprising a first cylindrical member, a second cylindrical member to be inserted into the first cylindrical member, an annular restricting groove defined in an inner peripheral face of the first cylindrical member, an annular  
25 attaching groove defined in an outer peripheral face of the second cylindrical member and having a shorter length than the restricting groove in a direction of cylinder axis, a retaining member radially expandably and detachably fitted to the attaching groove for restricting range of relative movement between the

first and the second cylindrical members in the cylinder axis direction, and a radial-expansion restricting portion for preventing, through contact, a radially outward withdrawing movement of the retaining member from the attaching groove  
5 when the retaining member comes into contact, along the direction of the cylinder axis, against an end face of the restricting groove located on the side of an entrance opening of the first cylindrical member, wherein at least mutually contacting portions respectively of the end face of the restricting groove and an end  
10 face of the retaining member are formed as either faces extending substantially normal to the cylinder axis or tapered faces extending radially outward with respect to the entrance opening of the first cylindrical member, and wherein an annular space is defined between the outer peripheral face of the second  
15 cylindrical member and an inner peripheral face of the restricting groove of the first cylindrical member for allowing insertion and withdrawal of the retaining member.

According to the above-described construction, when the two cylindrical members flexibly and un-  
20 withdrawably connected to each other via the retaining member are subjected to an external force in the withdrawing direction due to an earthquake or differential settlement, these cylindrical members move relative to each other within the movable range

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defined by the length of the restricting groove, and the retaining member fitted to the attaching groove of the second cylindrical member comes into contact, along the direction of cylinder axis, against the one end face of the restricting groove located on the side of the entrance opening of the first cylinder member. In the course of this, the portion of the retaining member contacting against the one end face of the restricting groove of the first cylindrical member and the further portion of the retaining member contacting against the attaching groove of the second cylindrical member are radially displaced relative to each other. Further, at least those portion of the mutually contacting respective end faces of the restricting groove and the retaining member are formed as faces extending substantially normal to the cylinder axis or as tapered faces extending radially outward as approaching the entrance opening of the first cylindrical member. Thus, the retaining member is twisted and pivoted in a direction where a diagonal direction of a cross section of this retaining member is aligned with the cylinder radial direction, with using the portion of the retaining member contacting the end face of the restricting groove of the first cylindrical member and the further portion of the

retaining member contacting the attaching groove of the second cylindrical member as reaction points for the pivotal movement. In the course of this twisting pivotal movement, the retaining member comes into  
5 contact with the radial-expansion restricting portion, whereby the retaining member may be reliably prevented from being withdrawn from the attaching groove.

Further, even if subjected to such withdrawing external force of a significant magnitude under the  
10 above condition, as long as the sum of the amount of the radially outward elastic deformation of the portion of the first cylindrical member on the side of the entrance opening thereof and the radially inward elastic deformation of the inserted portion of the  
15 second cylindrical member does not exceed the length of the diagonal line of the cross section of the retaining member, the retention condition between the two cylindrical members is not released.

Accordingly, since the radial length of the  
20 retaining member (consequently, the diagonal length of the cross section of this retaining member) functions effectively for preventing inadvertent withdrawal, the flexible pipe connector, according to the present invention, may be formed compact in the radial  
25 direction, yet may achieve superior withdrawal

preventive effect, in comparison with the conventional construction described hereinbefore.

According to a further aspect of the invention, the radial-expansion restricting portion comprises a radial-expansion restricting face formed at an end of an inner peripheral face of the restricting groove in such a manner as to come into contact with or come closer to the outer peripheral face of the retaining member contacting against the end face of the restricting groove.

With the above construction, when a significant withdrawing force is applied to the two cylindrical members to bring the retaining member into contact against the one end face of the restricting groove, the radial-expansion restricting face of the radial-expansion restricting portion comes into contact with or comes closer to the outer peripheral face of the retaining member fitted to the attaching groove of the second cylindrical member. Therefore, a radial engagement width between this retaining member and the attaching groove of the second cylindrical member may be maintained at or near a predetermined engagement width.

Therefore, the withdrawing external force applied to the two cylindrical members may be received in a

distributed state by the large mutually contacting portions of the end face of the retaining member and the one end face of the attaching groove of the second cylindrical member, respectively.

5           As a result, it is possible to reliably restrict damage due to decrease in the engagement width between the retaining member and the attaching groove of the second cylindrical member.

10           According to a still further aspect of the present invention, the radial-expansion restricting portion comprises a radial-expansion restricting face of a restricting member engaged and retained at one end of the inner peripheral face of the restricting groove in such a manner as to come into contact with  
15           or come closer to the outer peripheral face of the retaining member contacting against the end face of the restricting groove.

          With the above-described construction, a conventional flexible pipe connector in which a radial  
20           mutual opposing distance between the outer peripheral face of the second cylindrical member and the inner peripheral face of the restricting groove of the first cylindrical member is set so as to allow insertion/withdrawal of the restricting member over  
25           the entire axial length of the restricting groove, may

be modified to achieve the above-described effect,  
with such simple and economical modification for  
causing the restricting member to be engaged and  
retained at the one end of the inner peripheral face  
5 of the restricting groove of this pipe connector.

According to a still further aspect of the  
present invention, the outer peripheral face and the  
radial-expansion restricting face of the retaining  
member are formed respectively as a tapered face  
10 gradually reduced in the radial direction as  
approaching the entrance opening of the first  
cylindrical member.

With the above-described construction, in  
comparison with e.g. a further construction where the  
15 outer peripheral face and the radial-expansion  
restricting face of the retaining member are  
respectively formed parallel with the cylinder axis,  
the two cylindrical members may move more smoothly  
relatively to each other within the range defined by  
20 the length of the restricting groove, while the  
radial-expansion restricting face of the radial-  
expansion restricting portion is brought into contact  
with the outer peripheral face of the retaining member  
fitted to the attaching groove of the second  
25 cylindrical member when the retaining member comes

into contact against the one end face of the restricting groove in association with application of withdrawing external force.

5 According to a still further aspect of the present invention, the restricting member is capable of radially inward bending deformation and this restricting member is engaged and retained, under a radially reduced condition, at the one end of the inner peripheral face of the restricting groove.

10 With this construction, the restricting member may be caused to be engaged and retained at the one end of the inner peripheral face of the restricting groove, by utilizing the radially inward elastic resilience of this restricting member per se.  
15 Accordingly, this construction provides the advantage of facilitating the process needed for causing the restricting member to be engaged and retained at a predetermined position within the restricting groove.

20 According to a still further aspect of the present invention, an intermediate portion of the restricting groove of the first cylindrical member relative to the cylinder axis is formed as a radially bulging portion.

25 With this construction, in assembling this flexible pipe connector, when the second cylindrical

member is inserted into the first cylindrical member to bring the leading end of the second cylindrical member to the bulging portion of the first cylindrical portion, there is created a large annular space between the end side of the outer peripheral face of the second cylindrical member and the axially intermediate portion of the inner peripheral face of the restricting groove. Accordingly, through this large annular space, the radially expanded retaining member may be readily inserted from the leading end to the attaching groove of the second cylindrical member. In this manner, the efficiency of the connector assembly operation may be improved.

Further and other objects, features and effects of the invention will become more apparent from the following more detailed description of the embodiments of the invention with reference to the accompanying drawings.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a vertical section view showing an entire flexible pipe connector according to a first preferred embodiment of the present invention,

Fig. 2 is an exploded perspective view showing

principal portions,

Fig. 3(a) is a section view showing the principal portions before application thereto of an external force in a withdrawing direction,

5 Fig. 3(b) is a section view showing the principal portions during application thereto of an external force in a withdrawing direction,

Fig. 4 is a vertical section view showing an entire flexible pipe connector according to a second preferred embodiment of the present invention,

10 Fig. 5(a) is a section view showing the principal portions before application thereto of an external force in a withdrawing direction,

Fig. 5(b) is a section view showing the principal portions during application thereto of an external force in a withdrawing direction,

15 Fig. 6 is a vertical section view showing a flexible pipe connector according to a third preferred embodiment of the present invention, in which,

(a) is a section view showing the principal portions before application thereto of an external force in a withdrawing direction,

(b) is a section view showing the principal portions during application thereto of an external

25

force in a withdrawing direction,

Fig. 7 is a vertical section view showing an flexible pipe connector according to a fourth preferred embodiment of the present invention, in which,

(a) is a section view showing the principal portions before application thereto of an external force in a withdrawing direction,

(b) is a section view showing the principal portions during application thereto of an external force in a withdrawing direction,

Fig. 8 is an exploded perspective view showing principal portions,

Fig. 9 is a vertical section view showing an entire flexible pipe connector according to a fifth preferred embodiment of the present invention,

Fig. 10 shows a flexible pipe connector according to a sixth preferred embodiment of the present invention, in which,

(a) is a section view showing the principal portions before application thereto of an external force in a withdrawing direction,

(b) is a section view showing the principal portions during application thereto of an external force in a withdrawing direction,

Fig. 11 is a section view showing principal portions of an flexible pipe connector according to a seventh preferred embodiment of the present invention, and

5            Fig. 12 is a section view showing principal portions of a conventional flexible pipe joint.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

10           Preferred embodiments of an flexible pipe joint relating to the present invention will now be described in details with reference to the accompanying drawings.

15           [first embodiment]

Figs. 1 through 3 show a flexible pipe connector 1 for use in transport of fluid (e.g. tap water).

20           Into each of opposed ends of a first connector pipe made of cast iron as a first cylindrical member A, there is slidably inserted a second connector pipe 2 made of cast iron and forming, on the side of one end thereof, a partially spherical outer peripheral face 2a along a direction of cylinder axis X (cylinder axis direction). Further, on each of the outer

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peripheral face 2a of a spherical pipe portion 2A of  
the second connector pipe 2, there is slidably fitted  
a partially spherical inner peripheral face 3a formed  
at one end of a third connector pipe 3 made of cast  
5 iron and provided as a third cylindrical member C.

An annular attaching groove 5 is defined in the  
outer peripheral face of a straight pipe portion 2B of  
the second connector pipe 2. This attaching groove 5  
has an axial length along the cylinder axis X shorter  
10 than an axial length of an annular restricting groove  
4 defined at an intermediate portion in the cylinder  
axis direction X in the inner peripheral face of the  
first connector pipe 1. To each of these attaching  
grooves 5, there is detachably attached a retaining  
15 member 6 which is made of stainless steel and which is  
radially flexible. This restricting member 6 is  
brought into face contact with an end face 4a of the  
restricting groove 4 in the cylinder axis direction X,  
so as to restrict range of relative movement between  
20 the first connector pipe 1 and the second connector  
pipe 2 in the direction of cylinder axis X. And, a  
mutually opposing radial distance between the outer  
peripheral face of the straight pipe portion 2B of the  
second connector pipe 2 and the inner peripheral face  
25 of the first connector pipe 1 is designed so as to

allow insertion and withdrawal of the retaining member 6. In other words, an annular space for allowing insertion/withdrawal of the retaining member 6 is formed between the opposing faces, i.e. between the outer peripheral face of the straight pipe portion 2B of the second connector pipe 2 and the inner peripheral face 4b of the restricting groove 4.

As shown in Figs. 3(a), 3(b), there is formed a radial-expansion restricting portion 7. When an external force in the withdrawing direction generated in association with an earthquake or differential settlement is applied to the flexible pipe connector to cause the respective retaining member 6 fitted to the attaching groove 5 of the second connector pipe 2 to come into contact, along the cylinder axis X, against the end face 4a of the restricting groove 4 located on the side of the entrance opening (a) of the first connector pipe 1 (i.e. the side for allowing insertion of the second connector pipe 2), the radial-expansion restricting portion 7 functions to prevent, through contact, withdrawal of this restricting member 6 from the attaching groove 5 in the direction of cylinder axis X. Further, as shown in Fig. 1, the outer peripheral face of the straight pipe portion 2B of the second connector pipe 2 includes, as an

integral projection thereof, an annular stopper portion 8. This annular stopper portion 8 comes into face contact with the end face 1a of the first connector pipe 1 in the direction of cylinder axis X when the first connector pipe 1 and the second connector pipe 2 are moved relative to each other beyond a predetermined movement range.

Each of the radial-expansion restricting portion 7 is constructed from a radial-expansion restricting face 7a formed adjacent one end of the inner peripheral face 4b of the restricting groove 4 in the vicinity of the outer peripheral face 6a of the retaining member 6 when contacting the end face 4a of the restricting groove 4. The outer peripheral face 6a of the retaining member 6 and the radial-expansion restricting face 7a are respectively formed parallel with or substantially parallel with the cylinder axis X.

Further, each of the end face 6c of the retaining member 6 in the direction of cylinder axis X and the opposed end faces 4a of the restricting groove 4 in the direction of cylinder axis X is formed as a flat face extending normal or substantially normal to the cylinder axis X. Of the inner peripheral face 4b of the restricting groove 4, a border portion 4c

extending continuously from the radial-expansion restricting face 7a is formed as a tapered face.

An annular seal retaining groove 10 is formed adjacent each of opposed ends, in the direction of the cylinder axis X, in the inner peripheral face of the first connector pipe 1. This seal retaining groove 10 retains a first elastic sealing material 9 made of synthetic rubber material (e.g. styrene-butadiene rubber) for sealing between the inner peripheral face of the first connector pipe 1 and the outer peripheral face of the straight pipe portion 2B of the second connector pipe 2. The inner peripheral face 3a of the spherical pipe portion 3A of the third connector pipe 3 defines an annular seal retaining groove 12. This seal retaining groove 12 retains a second elastic sealing material 11 made of synthetic rubber material (e.g. styrene-butadiene rubber) for sealing between the inner peripheral face of the third connector pipe 3 and the outer peripheral face 2a of the spherical pipe portion 2A of the second connector pipe 2. Further, a connector flange 3C is formed integrally with the end of the straight pipe portion 3B of the third connector pipe 3. This connector flange 3C includes a plurality of connecting through holes 3b coaxially arranged for fixedly connecting a certain

external piping device P such as a fluid transport pipe (e.g. water pipe) or a sluice valve by means of bolts and nuts.

5 On the inner peripheral face, in the vicinity of the entrance opening, of the spherical pipe portion 3A of the third connector pipe 3, there are attached a sliding guide member 13 made of cast iron and a stopper member 14 made of stainless steel. The sliding guide member 13 includes a partially spherical  
10 sliding face 13a for coming into sliding contact with the outer peripheral face 2a of the spherical pipe portion 2A of the second connector pipe 2. The stopper member 14 is constructed as a C-shaped member radially flexible for preventing inadvertent  
15 withdrawal of the sliding guide member 13.

The straight pipe portion 2B of the second connector pipe 2, defines, at the leading end thereof, a tapered face 2b adapted for guiding the retaining member 6 while radially expanding it. The retaining  
20 member 6 is constructed as a C-shaped ring member having one peripheral portion thereof cutaway, and at opposed free ends of this C-shaped member, there are formed radial-expansion operating holes 6b for allowing elastic radial expansion of the retaining  
25 member 6 by some appropriate tool.

In operation, when the first and second connector pipes 1, 2 un-withdrawably connected to each other via the retaining member 6 are subjected to an external force in the withdrawing direction due to an earthquake or differential settlement, these first and second connector pipes 1, 2 move relative to each other to the movable limit within the movable range defined by the length of the restricting groove 4, and the retaining member 6 fitted to the attaching groove 5 of the second connector pipe 2 comes into contact, along the direction of cylinder axis, against the one end face 4a of the restricting groove 4 located on the side of the entrance opening (a) of the first connector pipe 1.

In the course of the above, the portion of the retaining member 6 contacting against the one end face 4a of the restricting groove 4 of the first connector pipe 1 and the further portion of the retaining member 6 contacting against the end face of the attaching groove 5 of the second connector pipe 2 are radially displaced relative to each other. Further, the respective end faces 4a, 6c of the restricting groove 4 and the retaining member 6 are formed as flat faces extending substantially normal to the cylinder axis X. Thus, the retaining member 6 is twisted and pivoted in

a direction where a diagonal direction of a cross section of this retaining member 6 is aligned with the cylinder radial direction, with using the portion of the retaining member 6 contacting the end face 4a of the restricting groove 4 of the first connector pipe 1 and the further portion of the retaining member 6 contacting the end face of the attaching groove 5 of the second connector pipe 2 as reaction points for the pivotal movement. In the course of this twisting pivotal movement, the retaining member 6 comes into contact with the radial-expansion restricting face 7a, whereby the retaining member 6 may be reliably prevented from being withdrawn from the attaching groove 5.

Further, even if subjected to such withdrawing external force of a significant magnitude under the above condition, as long as the sum of the amount of the radially outward elastic deformation of the portion of the first connector pipe on the side of the entrance opening (a) thereof and the radially inward elastic deformation of the inserted portion of the second connector pipe 2 does not exceed the length of the diagonal line of the cross section of the retaining member 6, the retention condition between the first and second connector pipes 1, 2 is not

released.

When an external bending moment or shearing force is applied due to an earthquake or differential settlement in a direction transversing the cylinder axis X, by a relative sliding movement between the outer peripheral face 2a of the spherical pipe portion 2A of the second connector pipe 2 and the inner peripheral face 3a of the spherical pipe portion 3A of the third connector pipe 3 along their spherical configurations, the second connector pipe 2 and the third connector pipe 3 may be flexed relative to each other, thereby to restrict damage to the flexible pipe connector.

Further, when the second connector pipe 2 and the third connector pipe 3 have flexed to the maximum angle along the spherical configurations, the stopper portion 8 formed as a projection from the outer peripheral face of the straight pipe portion 2B of the second connector pipe 2 is designed so as to remain outside the flexion pivoting range of the opened end face of the spherical pipe portion 3A of the third connector pipe 3.

For this reason, even when an external force in the direction transversing the cylinder axis X is applied after application of the external force in the

withdrawing direction, the stopper portion 8 prevents, through contact, the end face 1a of the first connector pipe 1 slidably radially retracting relative to the straight pipe portion 2B of the second connector pipe 2 from coming into the flexion pivotal range of the opened end of the spherical pipe portion 3A of the third connector pipe 3, so that the second connector pipe 2 and the third connector pipe 3 may always flex relative to each other to the maximum angle in a reliable manner.

[second embodiment]

Figs. 4 and 5 show a flexible pipe connector for use in transport of fluid (e.g. tap water). Each of opposed ends of a second connector pipe 16 in the form of a straight pipe made of cast iron as a second cylindrical member B is slidably inserted, in the direction of cylinder axis X, into a first spherical ring member 15 made of cast iron as a first cylindrical member A having a partially spherical configuration. And, on an outer peripheral face 15a of each spherical ring member 15, there is slidably fitted a partially spherical inner peripheral face 17a formed at one end of a third connector pipe 3.

An annular attaching groove 5 is defined at an end in the direction of cylinder axis X in the outer peripheral face of the second connector pipe 16. This attaching groove 5 has an axial length along the cylinder axis X shorter than an axial length of an annular restricting groove 4 defined at an intermediate portion in the cylinder axis direction X of the inner peripheral face of the spherical ring member 15. To each of these attaching grooves 5, there is detachably attached a retaining member 6 which is made of stainless steel and which is radially flexible. This retaining member 6 is brought into face contact with an end face 4a, 4d of the restricting groove 4 in the cylinder axis direction X, so as to restrict range of relative movement between the spherical ring member 15 and the second connector pipe 16 in the direction of cylinder axis X. And, a mutually opposing radial distance between the outer peripheral face of the second connector pipe 16 and the inner peripheral face 4b of the restricting groove 4 is designed so as to allow insertion and withdrawal of the retaining member 6. In other words, an annular space for allowing insertion/withdrawal of the retaining member 6 is formed between the opposing faces, i.e. between the outer peripheral face of the

second connector pipe 2 and the inner peripheral face 4b of the restricting groove 4.

As shown in Figs. 5(a), 5(b), there is formed a radial-expansion restricting portion 7. When an external force in the withdrawing direction generated in association with an earthquake or differential settlement is applied to the flexible pipe connector to cause the retaining member 6 fitted to the attaching groove 5 of the second connector pipe 16 to come into contact, along the cylinder axis X, against the end face 4a of the restricting groove 4 located on the side of the entrance opening (a) of the spherical ring member 15 (i.e. the side for allowing insertion of the second connector pipe 16), the radial-expansion restricting portion 7 functions to prevent, through contact, withdrawal of this restricting member 6 from the attaching groove 5 in the direction of cylinder axis X. When the external force due to an earthquake or differential settlement is applied to the flexible pipe connector to cause the spherical ring member 15 and the second connector pipe 16 to move relative to each other beyond a predetermined movement range, the retaining member 6 fitted to the attaching groove 5 of the second connector pipe 16 comes into face contact with the other end face 4d of the restricting groove 4

of the spherical ring member 15 along the direction of the cylinder axis.

Each of the radial-expansion restricting portion 7 is constructed from a radial-expansion restricting face 7a formed adjacent one end of the inner peripheral face 4b of the restricting groove 4 in the vicinity of the outer peripheral face 6a of the retaining member 6 when contacting the end face 4a of the restricting groove 4. The outer peripheral face 6a of the retaining member 6 and the radial-expansion restricting face 7a are respectively formed parallel with or substantially parallel with the cylinder axis X.

Further, each of the end face 6c of the retaining member 6 in the direction of cylinder axis X and the opposed end faces 4a, 4d of the restricting groove 4 in the direction of cylinder axis X is formed as a flat face extending normal or substantially normal to the cylinder axis X. Of the inner peripheral face 4b of the restricting groove 4, a border portion 4c extending continuously from the each radial-expansion restricting face 7a is formed as a tapered face.

An annular seal retaining groove 19 is formed adjacent each of opposed ends, in the direction of the cylinder axis X, in the inner peripheral face of the

spherical ring member 15. This seal retaining groove 19 retains a third elastic sealing material 18 made of synthetic rubber material (e.g. styrene-butadiene rubber) for sealing between the inner peripheral face of the spherical ring member and the outer peripheral face of the second connector pipe 16. The inner peripheral face 17a of the spherical pipe portion 17A of the third connector pipe 17 defines an annular seal retaining groove 21. This seal retaining groove 21 retains a fourth elastic sealing material 20 made of synthetic rubber material (e.g. styrene-butadiene rubber) for sealing between the inner peripheral face of the third connector pipe and the outer peripheral face 15a of the spherical ring member 15. Further, a connector flange 17C is formed integrally with an end of the straight pipe portion 17B of the third connector pipe 17. This connector flange 17C includes a plurality of connecting through holes 17b coaxially arranged for fixedly connecting a certain external piping device P such as a fluid transport pipe (e.g. water pipe) or a sluice valve by means of bolts and nuts.

The outer peripheral face of the second connector pipe 16 includes, adjacent the leading end thereof, a tapered face 16a adapted for guiding the retaining

member 6 while radially expanding it. The retaining member 6 is constructed as a C-shaped ring member having one peripheral portion thereof cutaway, and at opposed free ends of this C-shaped there are formed radial-expansion operating holes for allowing elastic radial expansion of the retaining member 6 by some appropriate tool.

In operation, when the spherical ring members 15 and the second connector pipe 16 which are un-withdrawably connected to each other via the retaining members 6 are subjected to an external force in the withdrawing direction due to an earthquake or differential settlement, these spherical ring members 15 and the second connector pipe 16 respectively move relative to each other to the limit within the movable range defined by the length of the restricting groove 4, and the retaining member 6 fitted to the attaching groove 5 of the second connector pipe 16 comes into contact, along the direction of cylinder axis, against the one end face 4a of the restricting groove 4 located on the side of the entrance opening (a) of the spherical ring member 15.

In the course of the above, the portion of the retaining member 6 contacting against the one end face 4a of the restricting groove 4 of the spherical ring

member 15 and the further portion of the retaining member 6 contacting against the end face of the attaching groove 5 of the second connector pipe 16 are radially displaced relative to each other. Further, the respective end faces 4a, 6c of the restricting groove 4 and the retaining member 6 are formed as flat faces extending substantially normal to the cylinder axis X. Thus, the retaining member 6 is twisted and pivoted in a direction where a diagonal direction of a cross section of this retaining member 6 is aligned with the cylinder radial direction, with using the portion of the retaining member 6 contacting the end face 4a of the restricting groove 4 of the spherical ring member 15 and the further portion of the retaining member 6 contacting the end face of the attaching groove 5 of the second connector pipe 16 as reaction points for the pivotal movement. In the course of this twisting pivotal movement, the retaining member 6 comes into contact with the radial-expansion restricting face 7a, whereby the retaining member 6 may be reliably prevented from being withdrawn from the attaching groove 5.

Further, even if subjected to such withdrawing external force of a significant magnitude under the above condition, as long as the sum of the amount of

the radially outward elastic deformation of the portion of the spherical ring member on the side of the entrance opening (a) thereof and the radially inward elastic deformation of the inserted portion of the second connector pipe 16 does not exceed the length of the diagonal line of the cross section of the retaining member 6, the retention condition between the spherical ring members 15 and the second connector pipe 16 is not released.

When an external bending moment or shearing force is applied due to an earthquake or differential settlement in a direction transversing the cylinder axis X, by a relative sliding movement between the outer peripheral face 15a of the spherical ring member 15 and the inner peripheral face 17a of the spherical pipe portion 17A of the third connector pipe 17 along their spherical configurations, the spherical ring member 15 and the third connector pipe 17 may be flexed relative to each other, thereby to restrict damage to the flexible pipe connector.

[third embodiment]

In the first embodiment described hereinbefore, each of the outer peripheral face 6a of the retaining

member 6 and the radial-expansion restricting face 7a is formed as a flat face extending parallel with or substantially parallel with the cylinder axis X.

Instead, as shown in Figs. 6(a) and (b), each of at

5 least a portion of the outer peripheral face 6a of the retaining member 6 and the radial-expansion restricting face 7a may be formed as a tapered face gradually reduced in diameter toward the entrance opening (a) of the first connector pipe 1 (i.e. the  
10 side for allowing insertion of the second connector pipe 2) to come into contact with or come close to the outer peripheral face 6a of the retaining member 6 when contacting the end face 4a of the restricting groove 4.

15 The rest of the construction is the same as the first embodiment and identical components are denoted with identical reference marks or numerals and will not be described.

Incidentally, each of at least a portion of the  
20 outer peripheral face 6a of the retaining member 6 and the radial-expansion restricting face 7a described in the second embodiment may be formed as a tapered face gradually reduced in diameter toward the entrance opening of the spherical ring member 15 (i.e. the side  
25 for allowing insertion of the second connector pipe

16) to come into contact with or come close to the outer peripheral face 6a of the retaining member 6 contacting the end face 4a of the restricting groove 4.

5

[fourth embodiment]

In the first embodiment described above, the radial-expansion restricting portion 7 is constructed from the radial-expansion restricting face 7a formed at one end of the inner peripheral face 4b of the restricting groove 4 in the vicinity of the outer peripheral face 6a of the retaining member 6 contacting the one end face 4a of the restricting groove 4. Instead, as shown in Figs. 7(a), (b) and Fig. 8, the radial-expansion restricting portion 7 may be constructed from a radial-expansion restricting face 7a of the inner peripheral face of the restricting member 7A formed of stainless steel engaged and retained at one end of the inner peripheral face 4b of the restricting groove 4 for coming into contact with or coming closer to the outer peripheral face 6a of the retaining member 6 when contacting the one end face 4a of the restricting groove 4.

25

The restricting member 7A is comprised of an annular ring member having one peripheral portion thereof cutaway and this member 7A is capable of elastic deformation (bending deformation) radially inwards (radially reducing direction) and is engaged and retained, under the radially reduced condition, at the one end of the inner peripheral face 4b of the restricting groove 4.

At each free peripheral end of the restricting member 7A, there is defined a radial-reduction operating hole 7b for allowing this restricting member 7A to effect the radially reducing elastic deformation (bending deformation) by means of some appropriate tool.

The rest of the construction is the same as the first embodiment and identical components are denoted with identical reference marks or numerals and will not be described.

Incidentally, the radial-expansion restricting face 7a described in the second embodiment, like the above-described arrangement, may be constructed from a radial-expansion restricting face 7a of the inner peripheral face of the restricting member 7A formed of stainless steel engaged and retained at one end of the inner peripheral face 4b of the restricting groove 4

for coming into contact with or coming closer to the outer peripheral face 6a of the retaining member 6 when contacting the one end face 4a of the restricting groove 4.

5

[fifth embodiment]

Fig. 9 shows a construction in which a portion of the first connector pipe 1 described in the first embodiment is modified for improvement. Namely, in this first connector pipe 1, a portion 1A thereof located at an intermediate position of the restricting groove 4 in the direction of cylinder axis X is formed as a radially bulging portion.

15        With this construction of the fifth embodiment, in assembling this flexible pipe connector, when the straight pipe portion 2B of the second connector pipe 2 is inserted into the first connector pipe 1 to bring the leading end of the straight pipe portion 2B of the second connector pipe 2 to the bulging portion 1A of the first connector pipe 1, there is created a large annular space between the end side of the outer peripheral face of the straight pipe portion 2B of the second connector pipe 2 and the axially intermediate portion of the inner peripheral face 4b of the

20

25

restricting groove 4. Accordingly, through this large annular space, the radially expanded retaining member 6 may be readily inserted from the leading end of the straight pipe portion 2B to the attaching groove 5 of the second connector pipe 2.

The rest of the construction is the same as the first embodiment and identical components are denoted with identical reference marks or numerals and will not be described.

[sixth embodiment]

Figs. 10(a) and (b) show improvement of the flexible pipe connector described in the second embodiment. In this, the radial-expansion restricting portion 7 is provided. This portion 7 prevents the restricting member 6 from being withdrawn from the attaching groove 5 when an external force in the withdrawing direction is applied to the flexible pipe connector due to an earthquake or differential settlement to cause the restricting member 6 fitted to the attaching groove 5 of the second connector pipe 16 to come into contact, along the direction of cylinder axis X, with the one end face 4a of the restricting groove 4 located on the side of the entrance opening

(a) of the spherical ring member 15. Further, another radial-expansion restricting portion 7 is provided to the other end face 4d of the restricting groove 4 of the spherical ring member 15. This restricting portion 7 prevents the retaining member 6 from being withdrawn from the attaching groove 5 when an external force in the withdrawing direction is applied to the flexible pipe connector due to an earthquake or differential settlement to cause the restricting member 6 fitted to the attaching groove 5 of the second connector pipe 16 to come into face contact, along the direction of cylinder axis X, with the other end face 4d of the restricting groove 4 of the spherical ring member 15.

The radial-expansion restricting portions 7 constructed respectively from the radial-expansion restricting faces 7a formed at the opposed ends of the inner peripheral face 4b of the restricting groove 4 in the vicinity of the outer peripheral face 6a of the retaining member 6 contacting the end faces 4a, 4d of the restricting groove 4.

The rest of the construction is the same as the second embodiment and identical components are denoted with identical reference marks or numerals and will not be described.

[seventh embodiment]

5 In the foregoing respective embodiments, each of  
the end face 4a of the restricting groove 4 and the  
end face 6c of the retaining member 6 is formed as a  
face extending normal or substantially normal to the  
cylinder axis X. Instead, as shown in Fig. 11, at  
least a portion of the contacting faces, i.e. of the  
10 end face 4a of the restricting groove 4 of the first  
cylindrical member A (i.e. the first connector pipe 1  
or the spherical ring member 15) and the end face 6c  
of the retaining member 6 fitted to the attaching  
groove 5 of the second cylindrical member B (i.e. the  
15 second connector pipe 2 or 16) may be formed as a  
tapered face extending radially outwards as  
approaching the entrance opening (a) of the first  
cylindrical member A.

20 The rest of the construction is the same as the  
foregoing respective embodiments and identical  
components are denoted with identical reference marks  
or numerals and will not be described.

[other embodiments]

25

(1) In the foregoing respective embodiments, the radial-expansion restricting portion 7 is constructed from a radial-expansion restricting face extending continuously in the peripheral direction. Instead, this portion 7 may be constructed from a plurality of discrete projections spaced apart from each other in the peripheral direction.

In short, the specific shape of the radial-expansion restricting portion 7 is not limited to those described above as long as this portion can prevent the restricting member 6 from being withdrawn from the attaching groove 5 when this restricting member 6 fitted to the attaching groove 5 of the second cylindrical member B comes into contact, along the direction of cylinder axis X, with the one end face 4a of the restricting groove 4 located on the side of the entrance opening (a) of the first cylindrical member A.

(2) In the fourth embodiment described hereinbefore, the restricting member 7A is engaged and retained at the one end of the inner peripheral face 4b of the restricting groove 4 by utilizing the elastic resilience in the radially expanding direction of the restricting member 7A per se which is being

reduced radially. Instead, this restricting member 7A may be fixed to the one end of the inner peripheral face 4b of the restricting groove 4 by using a certain appropriate fixing means.

5           In case the restricting member 7A is fixed by means of such appropriate fixing means as bolts or welding, this restricting member 7A may be comprised of an annular ring member or of a plurality of discrete restricting elements slit apart from each  
10           other in the peripheral direction.

(3) In the foregoing respective embodiments, the flexible pipe connector is provided as an assembly of three components, i.e. the first cylindrical member A,  
15           the second cylindrical member B and the third cylindrical member C. However, the spirit of the present invention may be applied also to a different type of flexible pipe connector comprised of an assembly of two components, i.e. the first cylindrical  
20           member A and the second cylindrical member B.

(4) In the foregoing first through sixth embodiments, each of the end face 4a of the restricting groove 4 and the end face 6c of the  
25           retaining member 6 is formed as a face extending

normal or substantially normal to the cylinder axis X.  
Instead, only mutual contacting portions of the end  
face 4a of the restricting member 4 and the end face  
6c of the retaining member 6 may be formed  
5 respectively as such face extending normal or  
substantially normal to the cylinder axis X.

The invention may be embodied in other specific  
forms without departing from the spirit or essential  
10 characteristics thereof. The present embodiments are  
therefore to be considered in all respects as  
illustrative and not restrictive, the scope of the  
invention being indicated by the appended claims  
rather than the foregoing description and all changes  
15 which come within the meaning and range of equivalency  
of the claims are therefore intended to be embraced  
therein.

20

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The embodiments of the invention in which an exclusive property or privilege is claimed are defined as follows:

1. A flexible pipe connector comprising:

a first cylindrical member;

a second cylindrical member to be inserted into the first cylindrical member;

an annular restricting groove defined in an inner peripheral face of the first cylindrical member;

an annular attaching groove defined in an outer peripheral face of the second cylindrical member and having a shorter length than the restricting groove in a direction of cylinder axis;

a retaining member radially expandably and detachable fitted to the attaching groove for restricting range of relative movement between the first and the second cylindrical members in the cylinder axis direction; and

a radial-expansion restricting portion for preventing, through contact, a radially outward withdrawing movement of the retaining member from the attaching groove when the retaining member comes into contact, along the direction of the cylinder axis, against an end face of the restricting groove located on the side of an entrance opening of the first cylindrical member;

wherein at least mutually contacting portions respectively of the end face of the restricting groove and an end face of the retaining member are selected from the group consisting of faces extending substantially normal to the cylinder axis and tapered faces extending radially outward with respect to the entrance opening of the first cylindrical member; and

wherein an annular space is defined between the outer peripheral face of the second cylindrical member and an

inner peripheral face of the restricting groove of the first cylindrical member for allowing insertion and withdrawal of the retaining member.

2. The flexible pipe connector as defined in claim 1, wherein said radial-expansion restricting portion comprises a radial-expansion restricting face formed at an end of the inner peripheral face of the restricting groove such that the inner peripheral face of the restricting groove either comes into contact with or comes close to the outer peripheral face of the retaining member contacting the end face of the restricting groove.

3. A flexible pipe connector as defined in claim 1, wherein said radial-expansion restricting portion comprises a radial-expansion restricting face of a restricting member engaged and retained at one end of the inner peripheral face of the restricting groove such that the inner peripheral face of the restricting groove either comes into contact with or comes close to the outer peripheral face of the retaining member contacting the end face of the restricting groove.

4. A flexible pipe connector as defined in claim 2, wherein said outer peripheral face and the radial-expansion restricting face of the retaining member are formed respectively as a tapered face gradually reduced in the radial direction as approaching the entrance opening of the first cylindrical member.

5. A flexible pipe connector as defined in claim 3, wherein said restricting member is capable of radially inward bending deformation and this restricting member is

engaged and retained, under a radially reduced condition, at the one end of the inner peripheral face of the restricting groove.

6. A flexible pipe connector as defined in any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein an intermediate portion of the restricting groove of the first cylindrical member relative to the cylinder axis is formed as a radially bulging portion.

7. A flexible pipe connector as defined in any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein the first cylindrical member comprises a spherical ring member made of cast iron, the second cylindrical member comprises a second connector pipe having opposite ends in the form of a straight pipe made of cast iron, each of the opposite ends of the straight second connector pipe being inserted into the spherical ring member to be slidable relative thereto along the direction of the cylinder axis, a partially spherical inner face formed at one end of a third connector pipe as a third cylindrical member being fitted on an outer peripheral face of the spherical ring member to be slidable relative thereto along the partial spherical shape thereof.

8. A flexible pipe connector as defined in any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein the radial expansion restricting portion comprises a radial expansion restricting face formed adjacent one end of the restricting groove in the vicinity of the outer peripheral face of the retaining member when contacting the end faces of the restricting groove, the outer peripheral face of the retaining member and the radial-expansion restricting face being

respectively formed parallel with or substantially parallel with the cylinder axis.

9. A flexible pipe connector as defined in any one of claims 1 to 8, wherein at least mutually contacting portions respectively of the end face of the restricting groove of the first cylindrical member and the end face of the retaining member fitted to the attaching groove of the second cylindrical member are formed as tapered faces extending radially outward as approaching the entrance opening of the first cylindrical member.

10. A flexible pipe connector as defined in any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein a partial spherical face formed at one end of the second cylindrical member is inserted into each of the opposed ends of the first cylindrical member to be slidable relative thereto in a direction of cylinder axis, a partially spherical inner face formed at one end of a third cylindrical member being fitted on an outer peripheral face of a spherical pipe portion of the second cylindrical member.

FIG. 1

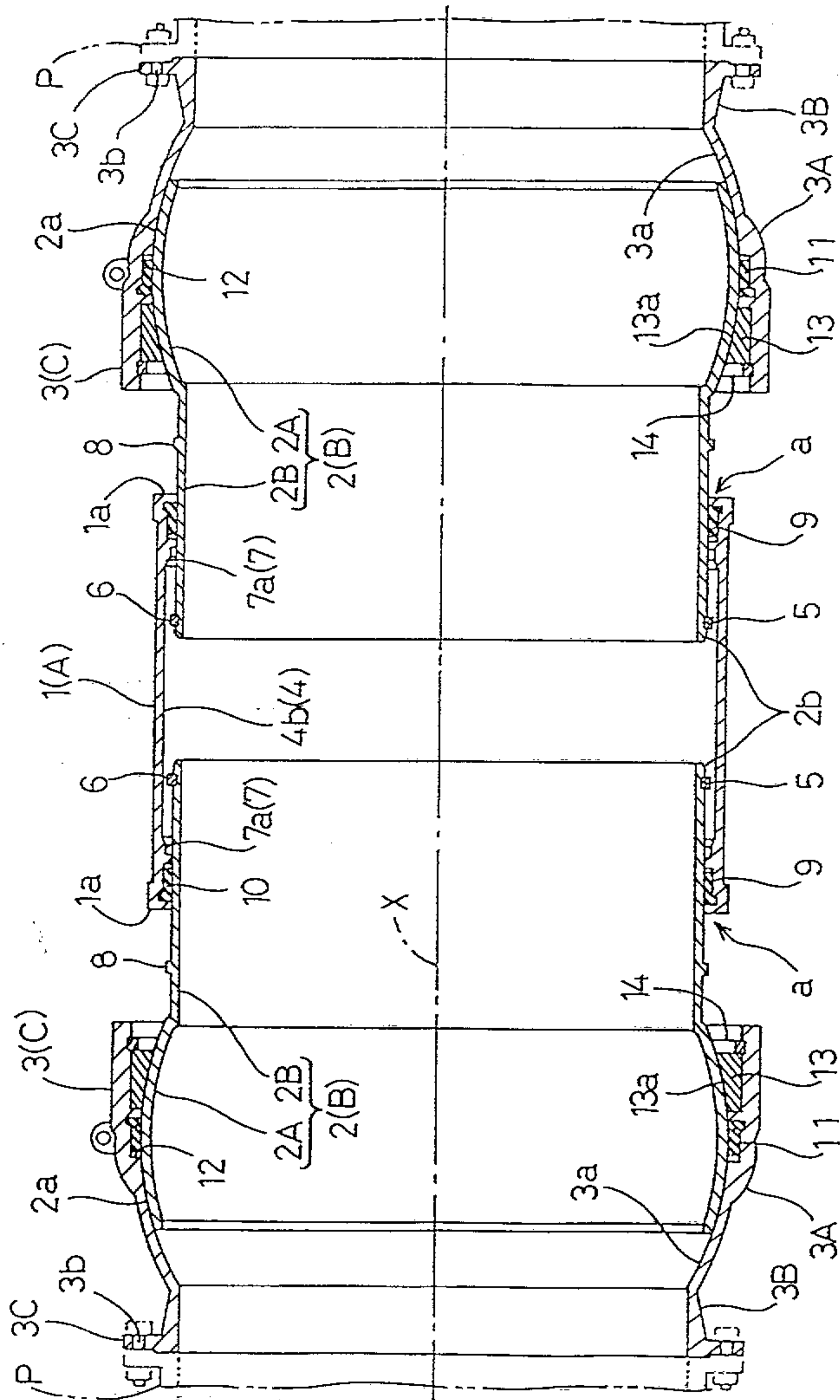


FIG. 2

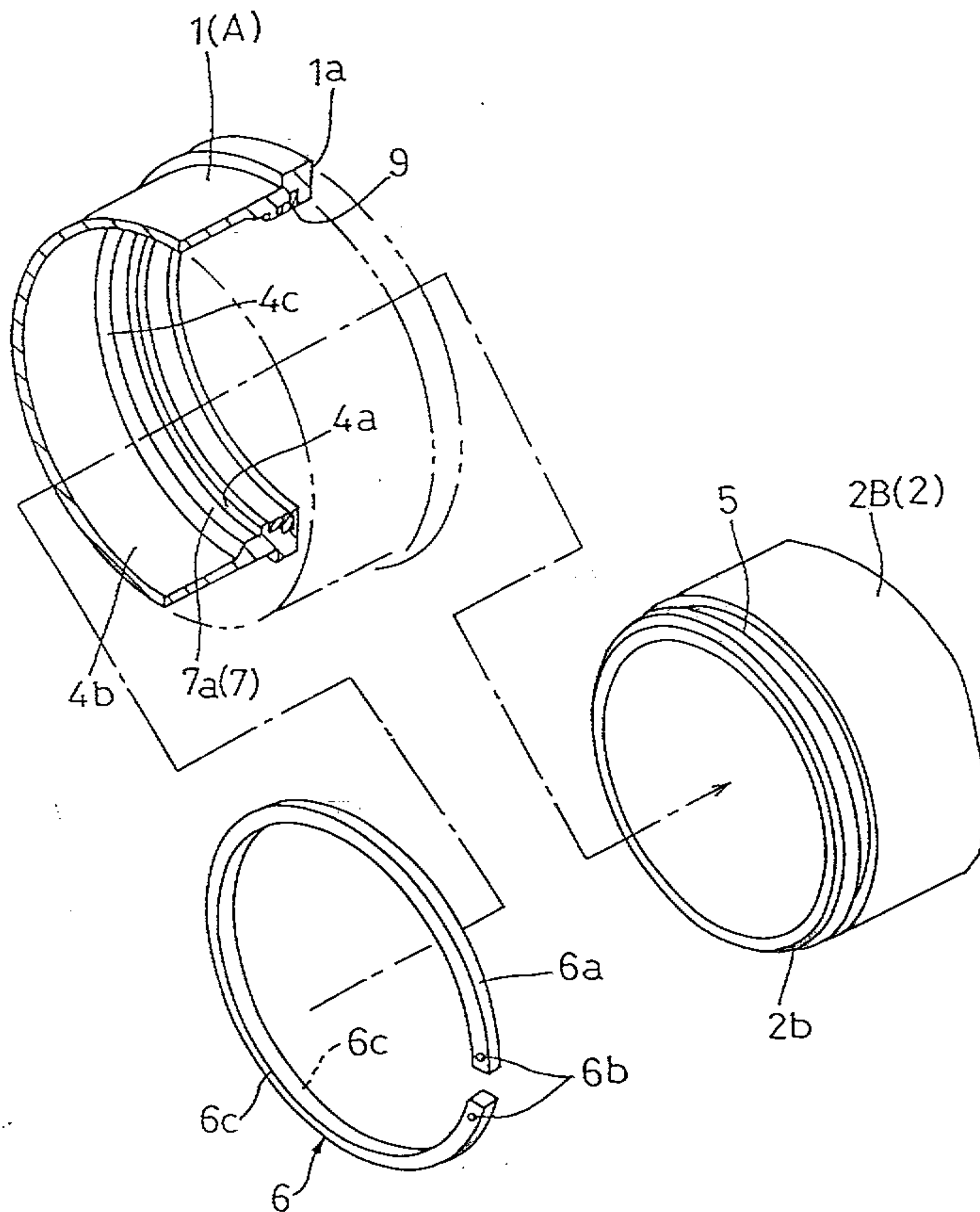
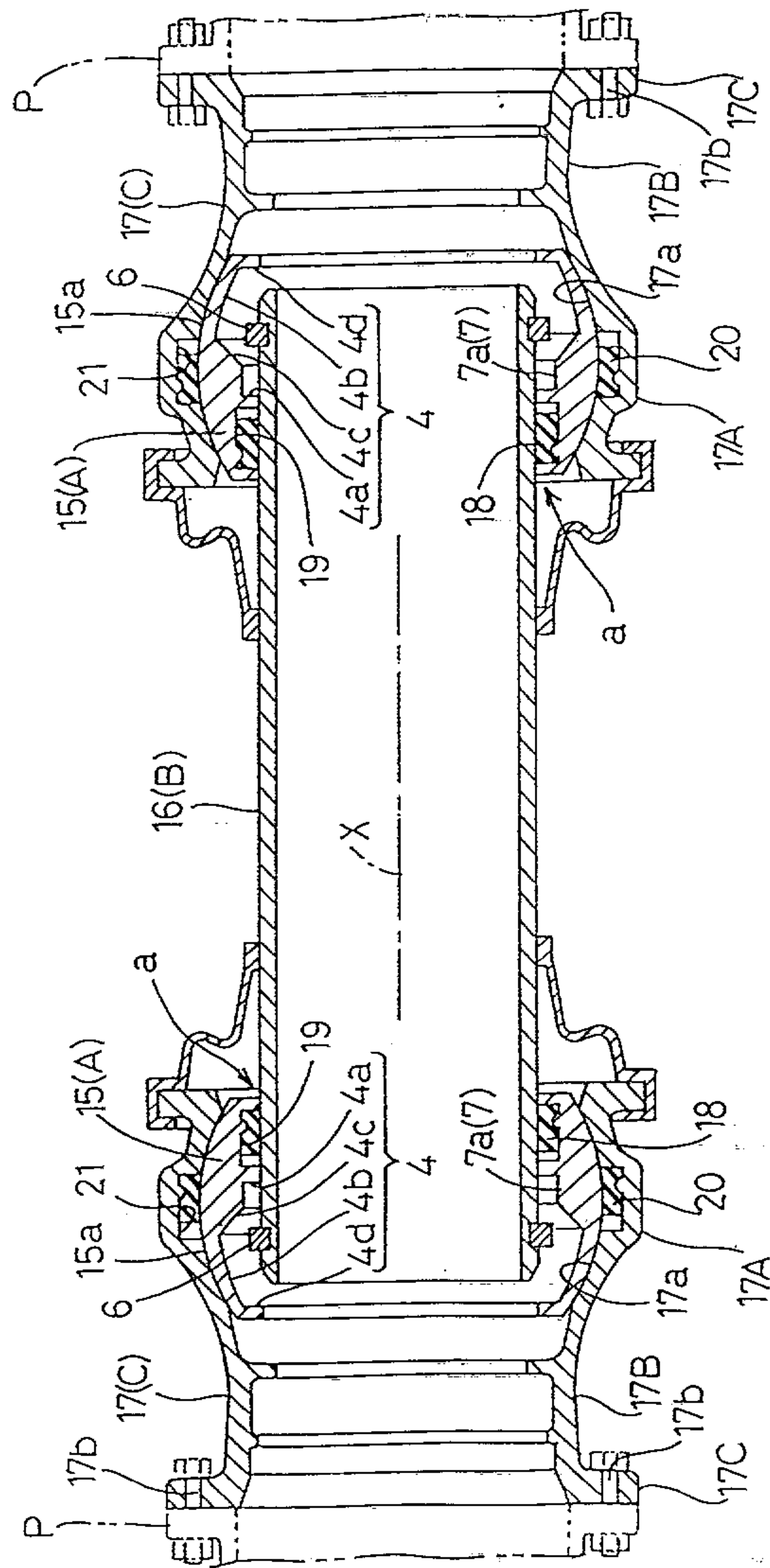




FIG. 4



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FIG. 5  
(a)

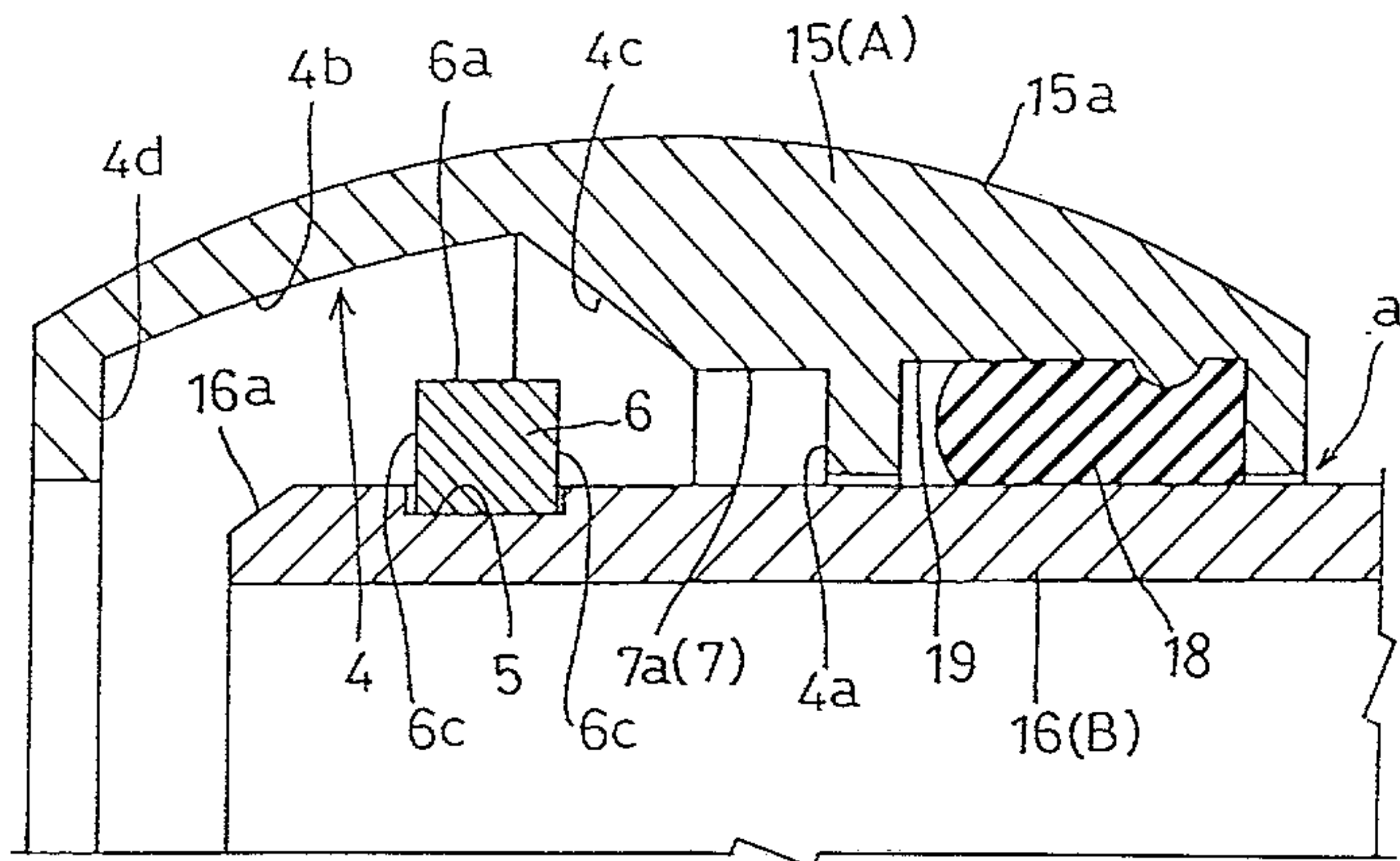


FIG. 5  
(b)

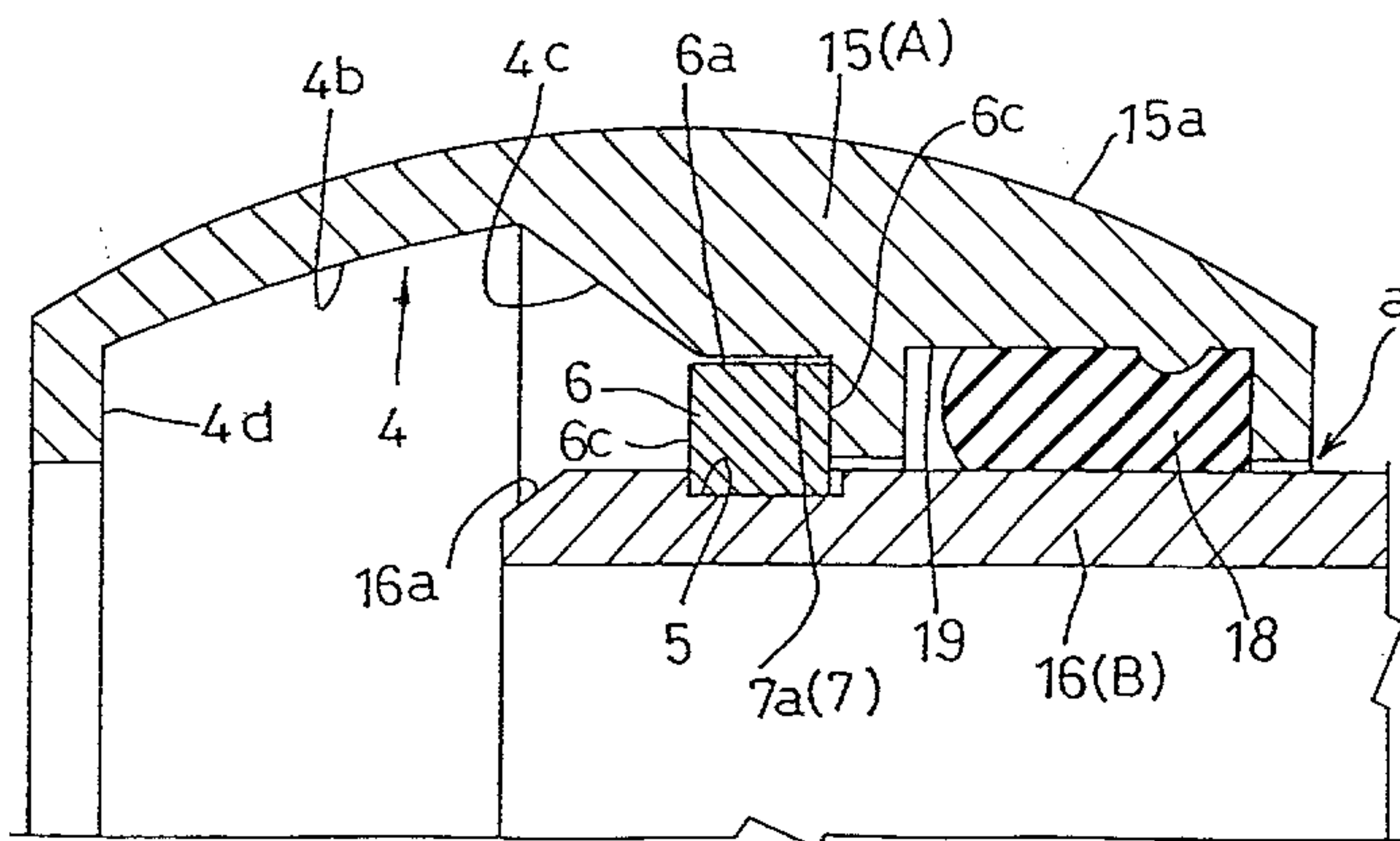


FIG. 6 (a)

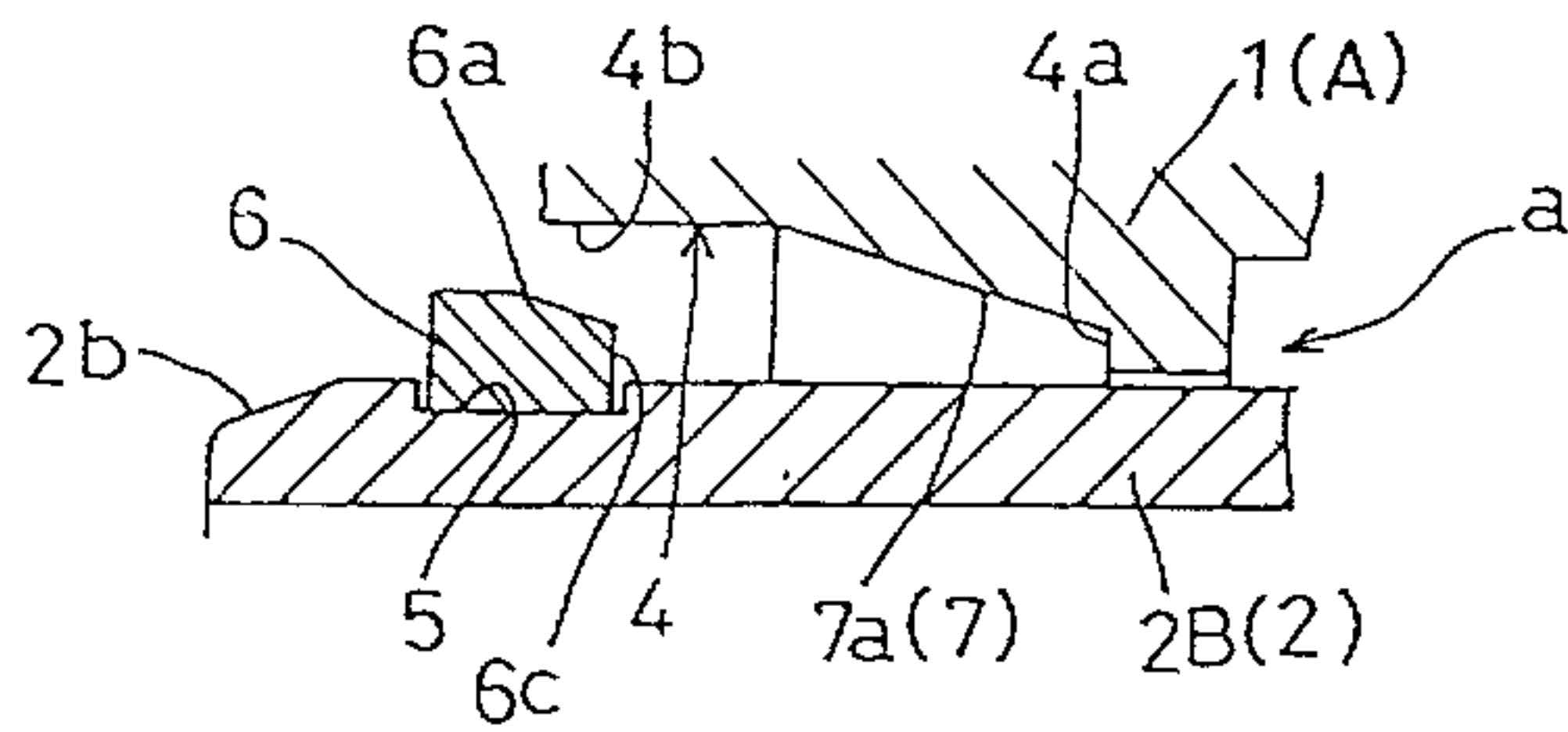


FIG. 6 (b)

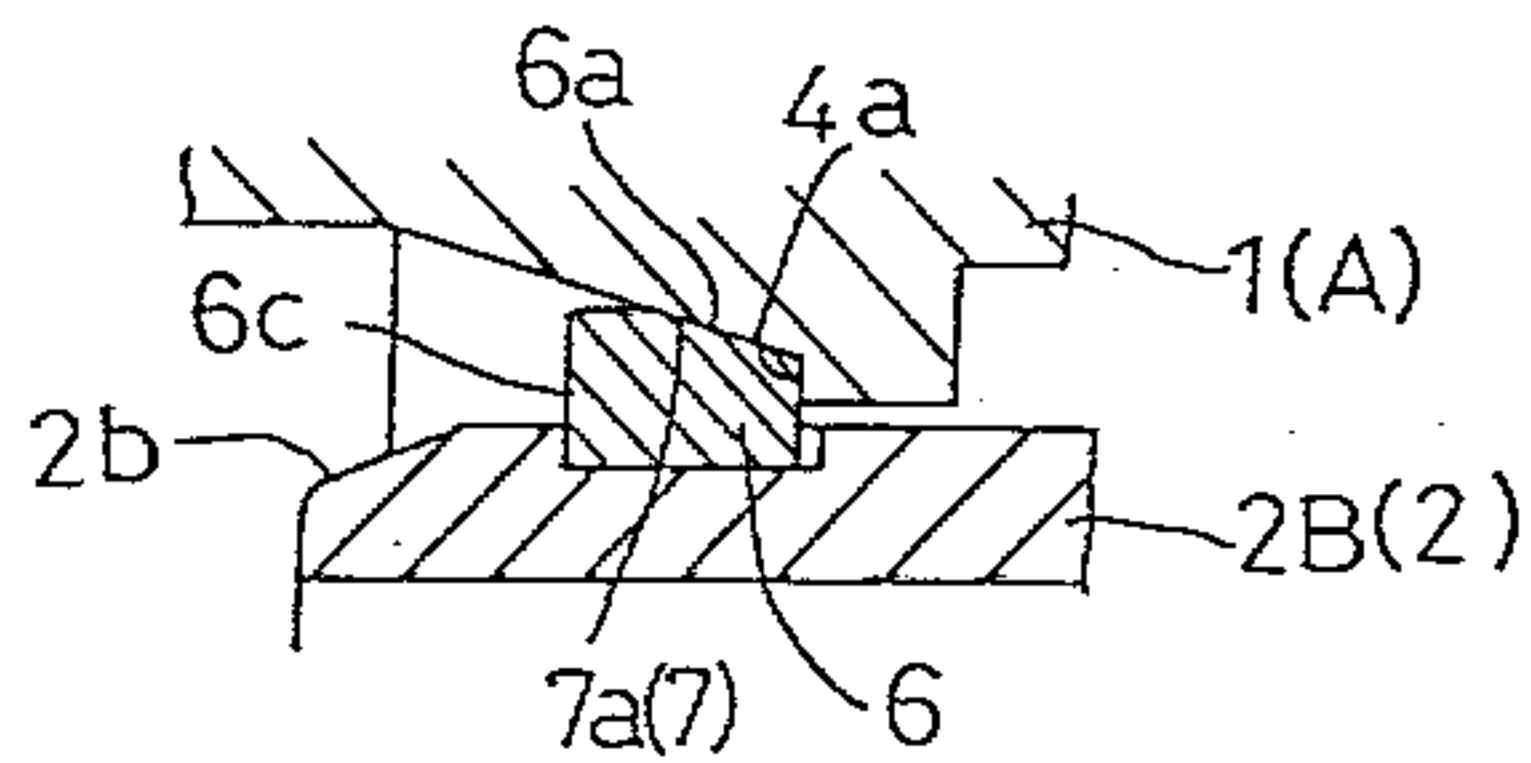


FIG. 7 (a)

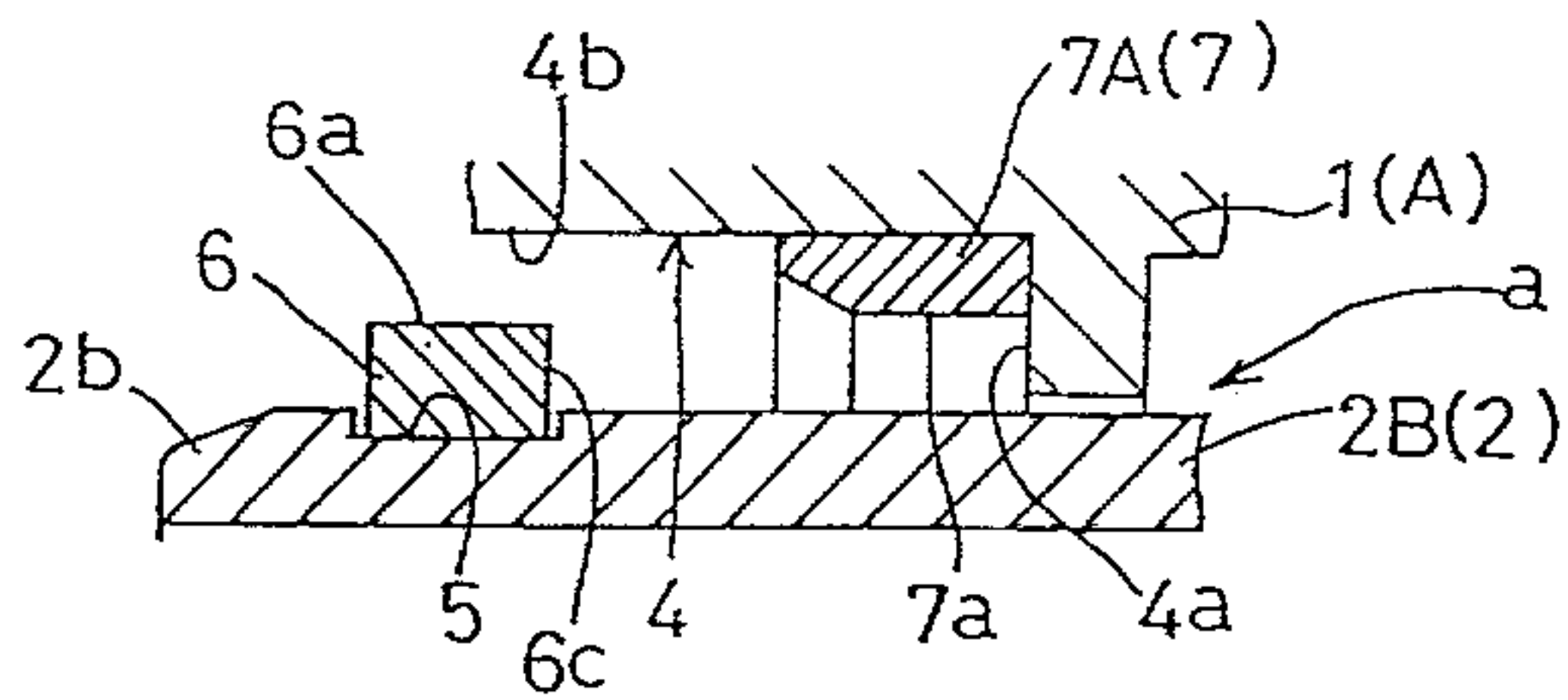


FIG. 7 (b)

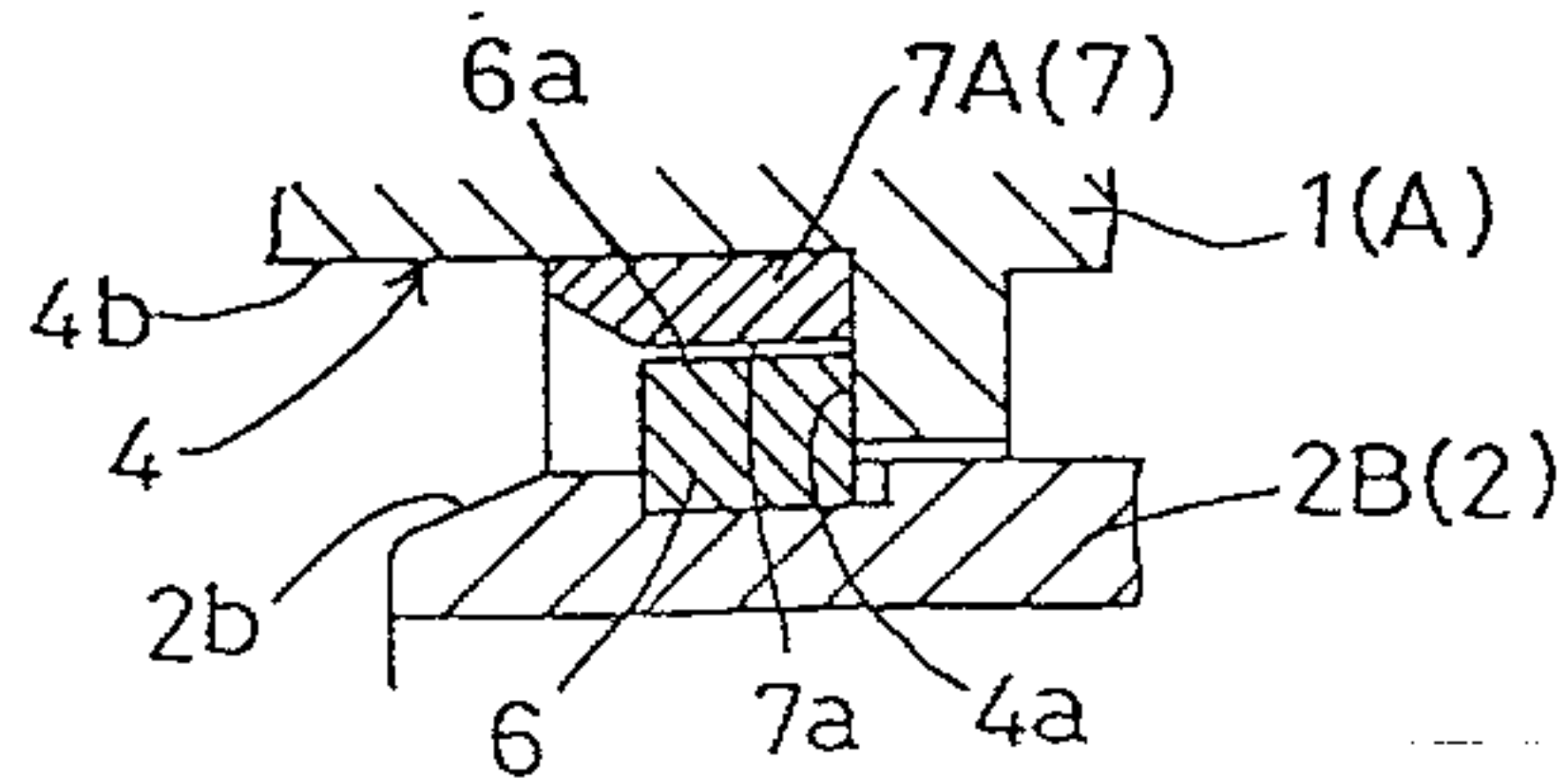
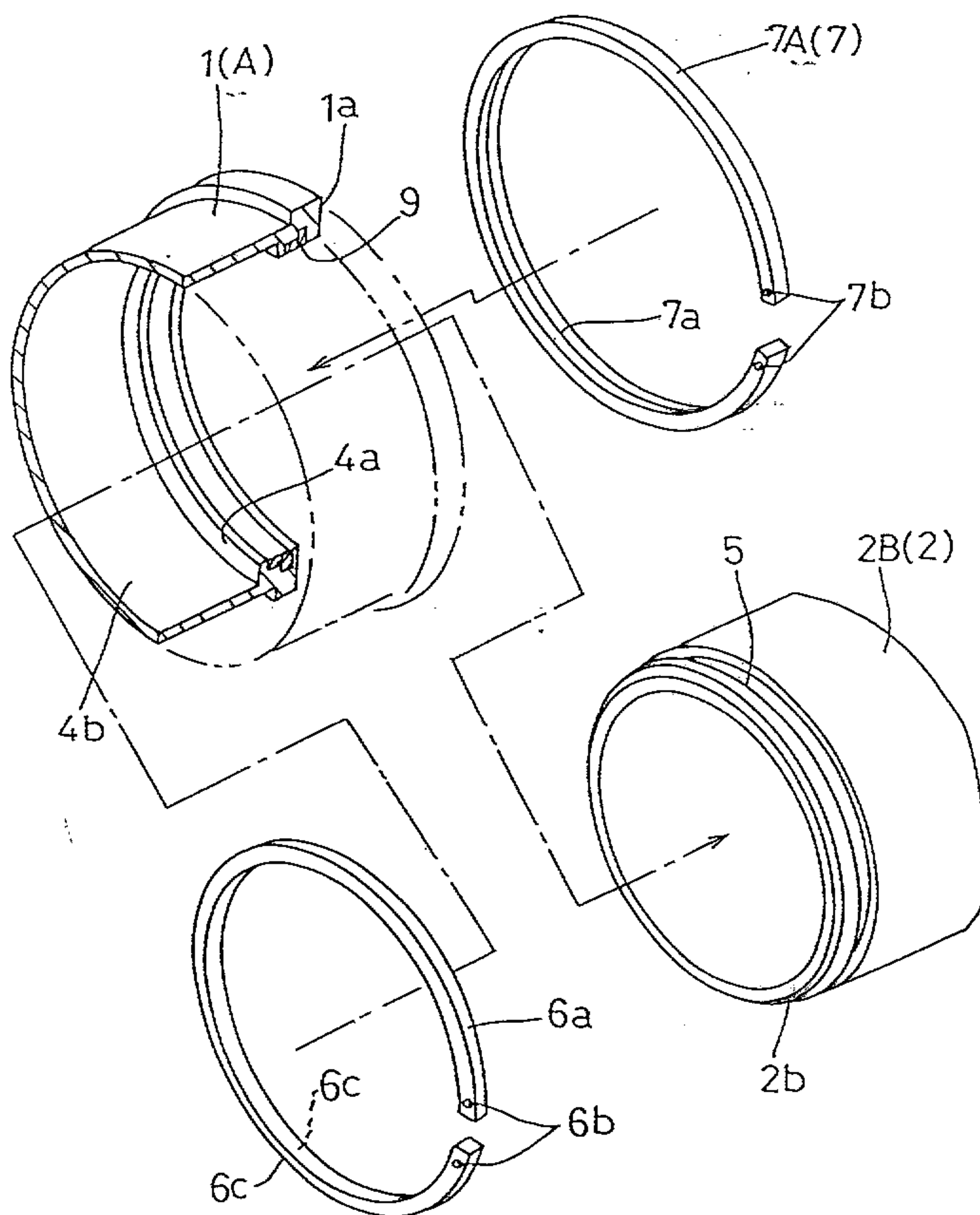


FIG. 8



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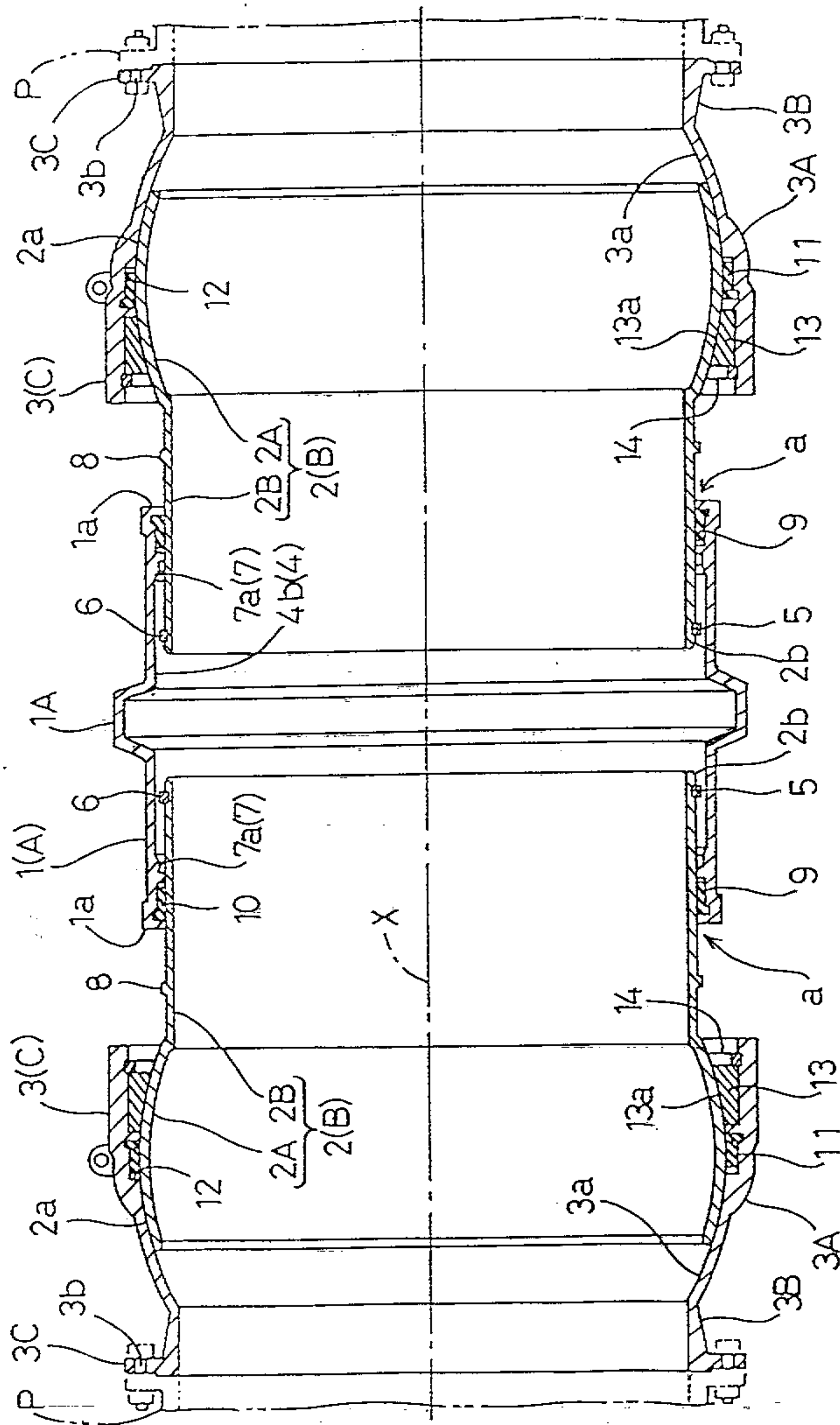




FIG. 11

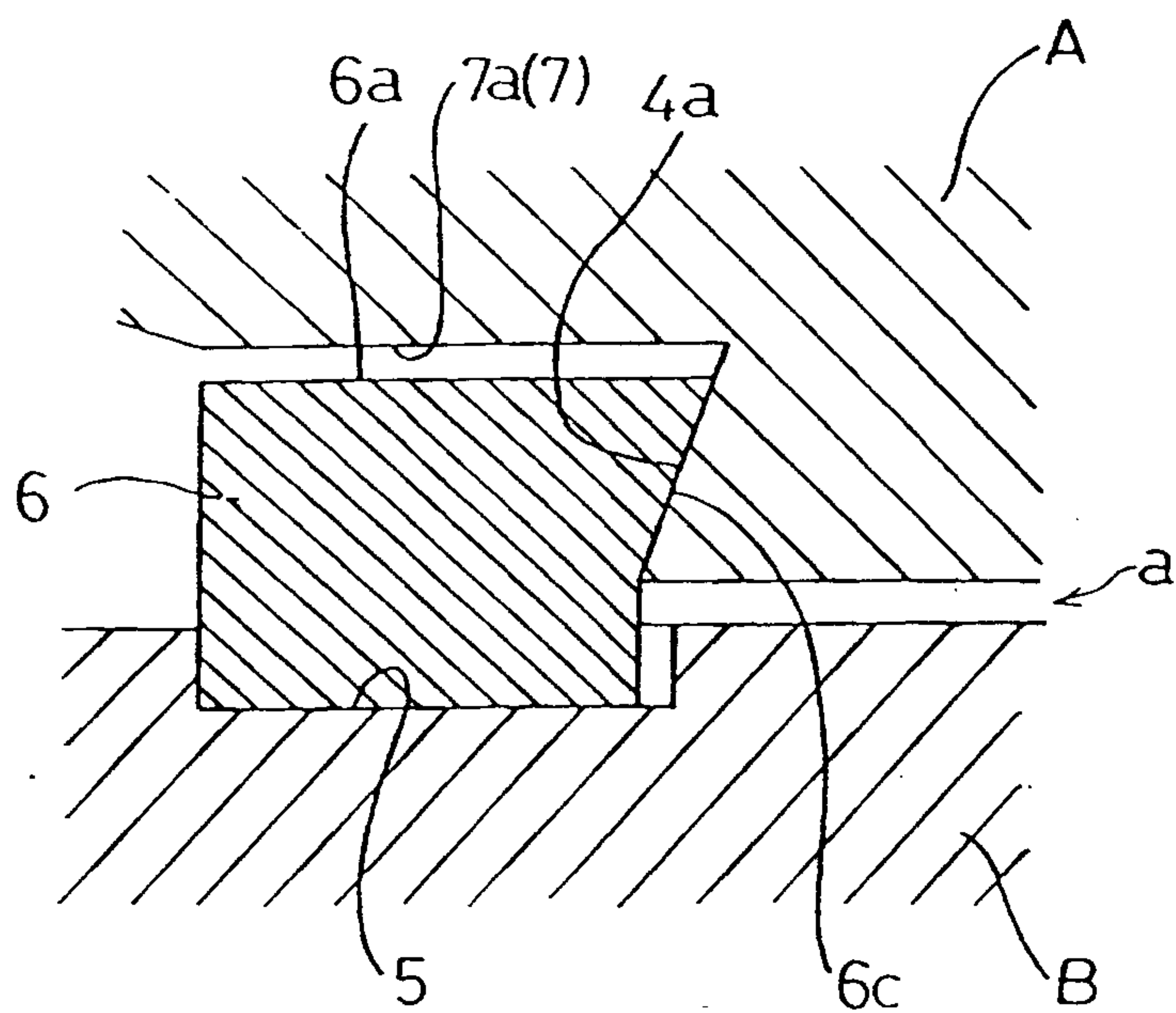


FIG. 12 (PRIOR ART)

